



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

Prior studies have identified weaknesses in the Superfund five-year review process. We evaluated whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has improved the quality, completeness, and timeliness of five-year reviews, and what impact the review process has had on remedies at Superfund sites.

Background

EPA's Superfund five-year review process examines the remedies at hundreds of Superfund sites where hazardous substances remain at levels that potentially pose an unacceptable risk. The purpose of the reviews is to determine whether remedies are, or will be, protective of human health and the environment.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20061205-2007-P-00006.pdf

EPA Has Improved Five-Year Review Process for Superfund Remedies, But Further Steps Needed

What We Found

Since our last review in 1999, EPA has taken actions to improve the five-year review process. These actions included issuing the *Comprehensive Five-Year Review Guidance*, providing training, and reducing the review backlog. While these actions have resulted in improvements, EPA needs to take additional steps to better support and communicate conclusions, continue to improve review timeliness, and provide fuller assurance that cleanup actions are protective of human health and the environment.

While we did not conclude that remedies were unsuccessful at achieving protection of human health and the environment, our evaluation of a random sample of 39 five-year review reports issued between Fiscal Years 2002 and 2004 showed that:

- 21 percent did not fully support their protectiveness conclusions
- 21 percent did not provide complete protectiveness conclusions
- 21 percent did not have sufficient information to implement recommendations
- 23 percent did not meet public notification requirements

EPA has not assessed the overall impact of its five-year review process on implementing and performing remedies because a system to provide complete information on the results of reviews had not been implemented.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA expand the scope of quality assurance reviews of five-year review reports, and revise guidance to more clearly define short- and long-term protectiveness determinations. To improve timeliness, we recommend that EPA evaluate the regions' workloads and available resources for five-year reviews for meeting due dates. We also recommend that EPA use data in a new information system module to measure the effectiveness and impacts of five-year reviews. EPA generally concurred with our recommendations. The Agency will need to provide further details on its plans to address Office of Inspector General recommendations within 90 days.